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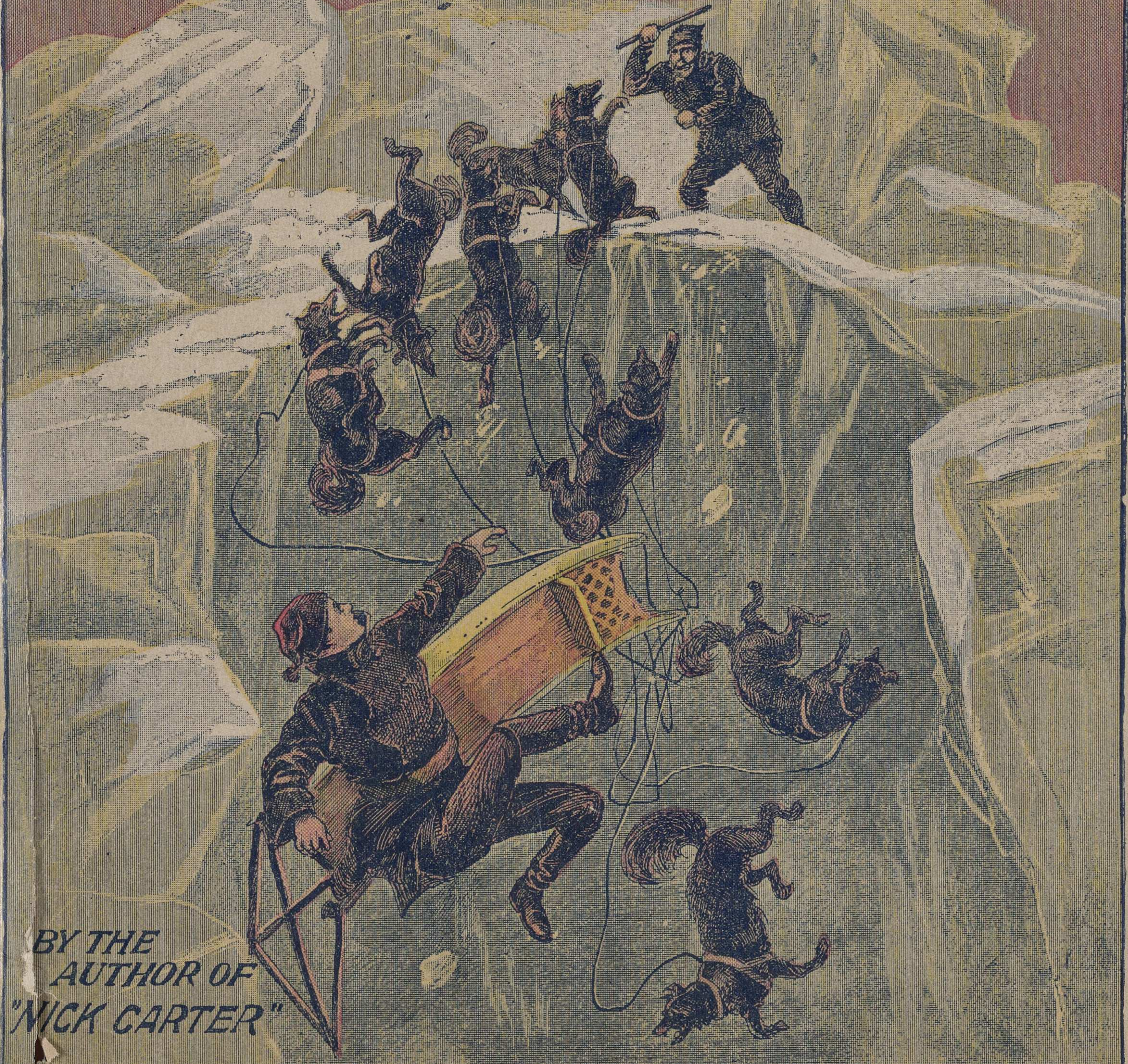
TRIM'S RACE ACROSS THE ICE FIELD

OR, HUNTING A CRIMINAL WITH A TEAM OF DOGS


BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

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TRIM'S RACE ACROSS THE ICE FIELDS;

OR,

Hunting a Criminal with a Team of Dogs.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

ROBBERY IN A MINING CAMP.

Half a dozen men were standing before a business building in Sitka.

"Well, Norton," said one of them, "we're ready for business. Let's make a start."

"I'm waitin' for Murdock, Mr. Bellows," was the response; "we can't very well go on without him."

"Why not?"

"He has the papers that prove our ownership to the mine."

"Well, you certainly can't expect to dispose of your property without those papers."

"Of course not; Murdock will be yere presently, I'm sure."

The men looked up and down the street in both directions.

The man addressed as Bellows was evidently impatient.

"It seems odd," he said, "that papers of such importance should be intrusted to one man's keeping——"

"You understand, Mr. Bellows," interrupted Norton, "that in this part of the country safety deposit vaults an' trust companies an' all thet sort of thing are not es numerous es they are in New York."

"Well, but there are such things as safes," retorted Bellows, "for I've seen them myself here in Sitka."

"Yes, we hev a safe an' it's in our headquarters on the island of Taska. Murdock is comin' from thare this mornin' to bring the papers."

"Well, I wish he would hurry up," growled Bellows. "I don't want to stay in this infernal cold region any longer than is necessary.

"I am satisfied of the value of your property and I am ready to take it just as soon as the papers can be made out."

"Es soon es we can agree upon the terms," added Norton.

"Yes, yes," assented Bellows, impatiently; "you know my offer, and these are the terms upon which the property will be transferred if it is transferred at all."

"We may hev some argymint about thet," remarked Norton.

"Yere comes Murdock now," exclaimed one of the others in the group. "Wonder what's the matter with him?"

All eyes were turned upon a man who was coming toward them on the run. His face was red with his exertion, and it was evident that he had been hurrying for a long time.

"He's trying to make up for lost time," remarked Bellows, severely, "which in business can never be done."

"It's time enough, Mr. Bellows," said Norton. "Now thet Murdock is yere we can get right at it——"

At this moment Murdock, who had come within a few paces of the group, dropped from his run into a slow walk.

"Well, Murdy," said Morton, cheerfully, "it's a good plan to make a bluff at hurryin' when you're behind time, but——"

Norton stopped because Murdock shook his head gravely and looked at the group generally in alarm.

"What's the matter, Murdy?" cried one of them.

"Lost!" he gasped, "clean gone—every one of them!"

"Gone?"

"Lost!"

"What's gone?" cried one and another.

"The papers," Murdock responded.

"Who did it?"

"When was it?"

"How did you find out about it?"

These questions and many others were asked excitedly, while Murdock stood there panting, hardly able to use his voice at all.

Their excitement caused a number of men who were passing to gather around the group.

"See here, gentlemen," said Bellows, "the open air is no place for this kind of talk."

"Thet's so," said Norton. "Let's go inside."

They accordingly turned about and went into the building to a room in the rear on the ground floor. This was a vacant office.

It had been engaged for the meeting of these men, and the janitor of the building had placed in it a dozen wooden chairs and a small plain table.

It was lighted by two windows, one looking out on the hillside at the back and the other upon an alley.

"Now, gentlemen," said Bellows, suddenly, when they were all inside, "what does this mean?"

"Yes, Murdy, what does it mean?" Norton repeated.

Murdock drew a long breath and responded:

"It means thet we've been robbed!"

Most of the men looked at Murdock as if they could not believe what they heard; and Bellows seemed to think that Murdock was lying.

"Robbed?" he exclaimed, contemptuously. "Why, what does anybody want to commit robbery for——"

"These Esquimaux are a race of thieves," interrupted Murdock.

"But will they steal business papers?" Bellows demanded.

"They might if they thought they could get anything for them."

Bellows grunted, sat down in a chair, and lighted a cigar as if he were disgusted with life generally and with events in Sitka in particular.

"Tell us about it, Murdy," said Norton.

"There's nothin' to tell," was the response. "I got your message last night that a New York capitalist was yere ready to buy the mine, an' thet all thet was necessary was thet I should bring the papers. They were in the safe then right enough.''

''How do you know?'' demanded Bellows.

''Because I looked.''

''When?''

''When I got Norton's message.''

Murdock had recovered his breath and was evidently getting angry. He looked sourly at Bellows and exclaimed:

''What right hev you to ask these questions, anyway?''

''Right——'' began Bellows, when one of the men in the party, named Payton, interrupted:

''Now you gentlemen hold easy; thare ain't goin' ter be no row about this until we know what we're rowin' about, see?

''Mr. Murdock, this is Mr. Bellows, of New York, him es hes the dust to buy the mine with. He's the feller thet Norton alluded to in his message to you.''

Murdock stared at Bellows without bowing and Bellows blew the smoke from his mouth and said:

''How do you do?''

''Mr. Bellows,'' continued Payton, ''this yere is Murdock, better known es Murdy, one of our pardners. Now, there you be introjuced es perlitely es ef you was in the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

''Now, Murdock, it's your deal. Turn out the keerds reg'lar, an' let's see what they're like.''

''Well, boys, an' Mr. Bellows,'' returned Murdock in a grieved tone, ''es I was sayin', when I got Norton's message, which was brought to me by Cadloo, the Esquimau, I was thet excited about the prospect of gettin' money thet I went right to the safe an' looked over the papers to see thet they were thare an' all right. They were, an' so help me!''

''What did you do then?'' It was Bellows who asked this question.

''I shut up the safe an' locked it,'' was the reply.

''What did you do next?''

''Well, next thing,'' continued Murdock, ''I gave out orders for to-day's work an' turned in early, because to get yere on time it is necessary to start long before sunrise. I got up at four o'clock. I went to the safe an' opened it, or rather I found it open an' cleaned out from top to bottom.''

''You found it open?''

''Yes. The lock smashed.''

''How was it done?''

''I don't know.''

''What do you think?''

Murdock hesitated.

''Blown up with powder, likely,'' he said at last.

Bellows scowled and the others looked gravely disappointed.

''Weren't you sleepin' above where the safe was kept?'' asked Payton.

''I was sleepin' in the room at the side,'' replied Murdock.

''Didn't you hear nothin' in the night?''

''Not a thing.''

''An' the safe was cleaned out?''

''Every durn thing, except a few letters, was gone.''

''And what did you do?''

''I routed out the camp, raised Ned generally with the men an' tried to find out about it.

''I couldn't find a thing, an' I thought the best thing to do was to come over yere es quick es I could.

''So Cadloo an' I got into our rowboat and came along. Thet's all thare's to it.''

Murdock's partners did not know what to say; they stared at each other a moment and then turned their eyes toward Bellows.

''Oh, don't look at me,'' cried the latter, ''as if I could tell you where your papers were. There's no doing any business without them, and when you find them you had better let me know. I'm going back to the hotel. I'd take a boat back to-day if there was one rather than fool around any longer.''

With this Bellows stamped out of the room. The others let him go without any protest.

''Thare's one thing about it,'' remarked Payton with a grin: ''this Mr. Bellows can't leave Sitka for two or three weeks, fer thar ain't no boat goes afore then.''

''That's so,'' said Norton, hopefully, ''an' in the mean time we may be able to find those papers.''

Murdock shook his head.

''Don't believe it,'' he said.

''We'll see about thet,'' remarked

Payton; "the point is, who could hev took 'em?"

Murdock sighed and dropped into a chair.

"It beats me," he answered.

"Some thievin' Esquimau might hev took 'em in the hope of a reward," said Payton.

"Maybe," returned Murdock.

Suddenly Norton brought his fist hard down upon the table.

"By gum!" he cried, "I've got it!"

"Got what?" asked the others.

"I've found the way out of this scrape."

"Well, let's hev it."

"You hain't forgot the way Fowler's Old Glory Mine was took away from him an' how he got it back?"

"Tain't likely we would forget thet," Payton responded, "when it's only a couple of weeks since it all happened."

"Well," continued Norton, "you know the kid thet did the business?"

"You mean young Trim Carter?"

"The same."

"We know him."

"Well, he's back in Sitka again."

"Is thet so?"

"Yes, an' he's the feller we want."

"He's a likely kid," remarked Payton, thoughtfully.

"Likely ain't no word fer it," cried Norton. "Tain't so much es he's got nerve, 'cause the rest of us hes got thet, an' the rest of us hes hed more experience by forty times than he's hed, but he's got the makin' of a detective, an' ef thare ever was a case thet called fer a detective's services, this one does."

"What can a detective, especially a boy, do with a lot of these thievin' Esquimaux?" asked Murdock.

"What could a boy," retorted Norton, "do with the rascally Englishmen thet tried to get possession of the Old Glory Mine?"*

"Well," returned Murdock, uneasily, "I don't believe thare's any good luggin' the youngster into it."

"It's our only hope," Norton insisted.

After a few moments' further discussion the rest agreed with him.

The result was that the party separated, the men going in various directions to hunt for Trim.

As the boy was off on a shooting expedition he was not found until about nightfall, and it was not until after dark that he was with all the partners in the office where they had expected to arrange with Bellows for the purchase of their mine.

CHAPTER II.

TRIM AS A WINDOW BREAKER.

Bellows was not present. All the parners, except Murdock, were evidently hopeful that Trim would instantly solve the problem that troubled them.

They looked at him with smiling faces, waiting for him to speak, while Norton described the situation.

Murdock sat by himself in a corner of the room with his arms folded and his chin sunk upon his chest.

Once in a while he glanced at Trim, but for the most part he kept his eyes upon the floor. From time to time Norton would say:

"Thet's the way it was, wasn't it, Murdy?" or, "Ain't thet the way, Murdy?" And Murdock would growl an answer:

"Thet was about it."

Farther than this he said nothing until Trim began to ask questions.

"Now you see, Trim," said Norton when he had explained the affair, "we're in a hole an' we want you to help us out of it. The question right at the start is, will you do it?"

"I'm in it," Trim answered, quietly. "I'll do what I can."

"Thet's half the battle," exclaimed Norton. And the others except Murdock looked highly pleased.

"Don't be so sure of thet," said Trim. "I'm not half es old es any one of you fellers, and I never made any bluff at bein' a detective——"

"Thet's all right, young feller," interrupted Payton. "You don't need to bluff, for you hold the keerds. Jest you name the limit an' we'll play your game from start to finish."

---

* Trim's connection with the Old Glory Mine is narrated in "The Gold Mine Case," No. 1, NEW NICK CARTER LIBRARY.

"What do you mean by namin' my limit?" Trim asked.

Of course Trim was familiar enough with poker to understand the remark in a general way, and he could see that Payton was a man who was so fond of the game that he could not help dropping into poker slang whenever he talked business.

The lad had an object in asking this question, and this appeared a moment later.

"Why," answered Payton, with a little hesitation, "this yere thing's bound to take your time, an' a man can't shuffle an' deal an' pick up the keerds, too, 'thout he hes at least a chance of winnin' some of the chips, see?

"In other words, Trim," said Norton, "this is a matter of business with us, an' we want you to look at it in thet light. Jest name your price."

"I thought thet was what you were drivin' at," Trim responded, "an' I tell you, es I did the fellers in the Old Glory affair, thet I ain't out for business, not yet. Ef this sort of thing keeps up an' I find thet I can do anything in this line, I may hang out my shingle an' put a price on my work.

"Es 'tis, I hevn't got any price, for I'm not certain thet my work is worth anything.

"I'll go into this thing for the fun of it, but I'll also go into it to win, an' ef thare's any question of price we can talk thet later."

"I, for one," remarked Norton, "would allow thet you should hev an equal share in the profits of our sale, ef we make one, thet is, provided you find the missing papers."

"Ef I find 'em," said Trim, "I shall hand 'em over to you, an' ef I've been put to any expense in the matter an' it's handy for you to meet it, you can do so. Now I want to know about this."

"I've told you all we know."

"You think you hev, but you hevn't."

"We hevn't meant to keep nothin' back, Trim."

"I know you hevn't, but you hev said thet possibly some thievin' Esquimau took those papers in the hope of gettin' a reward for 'em.

"Now, es I understand it, those papers proved your right to the property. Didn't they?"

"They did jest thet."

"Did you purchase the property from Esquimaux?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then is it possible thet the papers could hev been stolen by the people who formerly owned the property an' who hoped to get possession of it again by destroyin' the evidence of your ownership?"

"No," was the prompt answer. "The fellers thet discovered thet the island of Taska hed gold on it hain't in this yere part of the world at all.

"The Esquimaux hevn't made no claim to it in thirty year. I reckon no Esquimau could do anything with those papers except demand a reward for 'em."

Trim thought a moment, and during the silence there was a light ticking noise upon one of the windows. It was much as if a branch of a tree had been blown by the wind so that the leaves scraped the glass.

Nobody in the room paid any special attention to the noise, although two or three men turned curiously toward the window. Nothing was to be seen there except the darkness of the night outside, and nothing was said of the matter.

Trim himself appeared to pay no attention to it, although he did raise his eyes toward the window.

His thoughts were evidently far away. Presently he asked:

"Where is this island of Taska?"

Murdock suddenly became interested and active.

"I can tell you all about thet," he said, sitting up and putting both hands upon his knees.

"It's about forty miles to the northeast of yere an' six or seven miles from the mainland. It ain't a very big island."

Trim looked quietly at the speaker and asked:

"Do you fellers own the whole of it?"

"Every bit of it," Murdock answered, quickly.

Murdock was looking restlessly about the room and Trim was struck with his action and his sudden liveliness.

"Tell me all you can about the island," he said.

"Well, it's jest like a hill thet's stuck its nose out of the water. It's mostly rock with a few scrub pines growin' on it yere an' thare, an' the only buildings on it are those thet belong to our camp. "Thare's huts for the Esquimau laborers——"

"How many are thare of them?" Trim asked.

"Esquimaux?"

"Yes."

"Nine."

"Are thare other white men thare besides yourselves?"

"Oh, yes, half a dozen."

"Are they partners?"

"No. They work by the day."

"We hev really done a good deal with the mine, Trim," remarked Norton. "It's in good shape to pay, but it needs jest a little money to develop it, an' thet's why we're tryin' to sell——"

"Never mind thet now," Trim interrupted. "You've hed something stolen thet you want to recover, an' what I want to get at is whether thare is anything on the island to hide the papers in so thet a good search couldn't find 'em."

"Well, I don't know——" Norton began, when Murdock interrupted:

"I can make thet jest es clear," he exclaimed, "es ef you were on the spot yourself."

He arose and took from his pocket a paper which he unfolded and laid upon the table. It proved to be a map of the island, showing clearly the location of the buildings and the mining sheds, etc.

All the men gathered around the table and looked curiously at it.

Trim, of course, began to study it at once.

"Don't crowd," exclaimed Murdock, rather impatiently; "let the young feller hev a chance to get what he can outen the map. Give him room, the rest of you."

"Oh, thare's room enough," muttered Trim, with his eyes upon the paper.

A dozen men might have looked over his shoulder while he was studying the map and he would not have been disturbed by their presence.

Murdock, however, seemed to feel that there should be no crowding around the table, and he set the example by returning to his own corner, where he stood with his hands in his pockets watching Trim.

The others followed his example, just as men almost always will do when somebody takes the lead, and retired to other parts of the room, leaving Trim stooping over the table in the very middle.

He had one forefinger on the map and was rapidly committing to memory the lay of the land as it was marked there.

"What is this little circle——" he began, when everybody was startled by the sound of a pistol shot from without.

Trim felt a hot tingling upon his right cheek, as if somebody had struck him with a whiplash.

Both of his hands were upon the table and he was facing one of the two windows.

Those in the room were so startled by the sound of the shot that for just an instant nobody moved or spoke.

Trim, who had raised his head when he began to ask his question, saw a little round hole in the pane of glass directly opposite him.

He himself acted so quickly that those who saw him said afterwards that it seemed as if he leaped the very instant that the shot was fired. As Payton put it:

"It seemed jest es ef Trim knowed the shot was comin' an' jumped the minute the feller pulled the trigger."

What the boy did was to vault over the table, take one leap toward the window, and then folding his arms before his face, take another leap that carried him straight through it and out into the alley that ran alongside.

There was a tremendous crash of broken glass and splintered sashes, and the startled men within the room hurried to the wrecked window and looked out.

They could see nothing, but they heard the light sounds of hurrying feet and knew that Trim must have landed upright, and that he was now in pursuit of the fellow who had fired at him.

When Trim struck the ground he saved himself from falling by taking another leap, which brought him almost against the building at the other side of the alley

He put out his hands to the wall, caught his balance in the flash of a second, and turned his head toward the street.

He had been so quick about it that the fellow who had fired had not more than started to run by the time Trim came crashing through the window after him.

It was a dark night, but the would-be murderer had to pass a lighted window, and in the rays of the lamp Trim saw him. He was then less than twenty feet away.

It would have been an easy matter for Trim to shoot him on the spot, for the lad was a trained marksman, but it suited his purpose better to pursue and capture the fellow alive.

Accordingly he sprinted after the fugitive with all the speed of his wiry frame, and overtook him just at the edge of the street.

As Sitka is not a large town the main street is not particularly lively at night, and at this moment there appeared to be nobody in that vicinity except Trim and the fugitive.

As Trim came up the fellow threw something from him violently and turned to defend himself.

He was a short, stocky fellow, and even in the night Trim saw that he was an Esquimau. The latter put up his hands and put out one foot in an effort to trip his pursuer, but with his right Trim beat down the fellow's guard and landed his left so squarely upon his forehead that the Esquimau staggered back, fell, and lay still.

"There is no trusting a stunned Esquimau," thought the lad. He promptly stooped over, caught the Esquimau by the collar of his jacket and dragged him across the ground in the direction of the object which had been thrown away.

The boy's keen eyes had noticed what the object was and where it fell. It went across the street and landed on the sidewalk.

Trim dragged the unconscious Esquimau to the spot and picked up a revolver.

Then he yanked the Esquimau to his feet and was trying to shake him into consciousness, when a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder and a stern voice said:

"That will do, young fellow. I'm not going to see an undersized Esquimau abused by anybody. Let him alone, will you?"

Trim found himself hurled around and flung aside by a heavy, tall man, who was not only a stranger to him, but who was evidently not a resident of Sitka, his clothing indicating that he was a recent arrival from the States.

In this sudden interference Trim lost his grip upon the Esquimau, who was still more than half unconscious, and who staggered and would have fallen again if the stranger had not caught and supported him.

"Shooting irons, too!" exclaimed the stranger, angrily. "Good Lord! If it hadn't been for me there would have been murder committed here. Now, young fellow——"

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Trim, almost beside himself with rage. "The man you're helping was the one who tried to commit murder. You had better drop him or there will be trouble."

"Trouble, eh?" retorted the stranger. "Why, you little idiot, what do you think you could do? Drop that weapon there and go home where you belong."

Trim glanced at the revolver that he had picked up and then at the big stranger.

'See here!" he said, suddenly, "you could wipe up the street with me in a wrestling match, but you're goin' to drop thet Esquimau, jest the same, an' do es I tell you."

Without using any more words to explain what he meant Trim dropped the Esquimau's revolver at his feet, then he raised both hands suddenly and the stranger saw himself confronted by the gleaming barrels of two revolvers.

"They're self cockers," Trim remarked, coolly. "Now, you lean thet dirty lump of a man agin' the house thare an' mosey out of the way."

The stranger fairly gasped with astonishment, and there is not much doubt but that he would have obeyed Trim's command, but at that moment Norton and the others came rushing out of the building, where they had been holding their meeting.

Everything had happened so quickly

that they had had no more time to recover from their astonishment at Trim's exit through the window, and hurry through the hallway to the street.

"Why, hello!" said Norton, who came up first; "yere's Mr. Bellows! For Heaven's sake, Trim, don't plug him with lead, for he's the feller we want to sell our mine to."

CHAPTER III.

BELLOWS SURPRISED AND MYSTERIOUS.

"I don't care who he is," retorted Trim. "Ef he don't look sharp he'll be durn tired of the minin' business in Alaska."

"Ah, Norton!" exclaimed Bellows, "I'm glad to see you. I suppose I've no business to get mixed up in frontier rows, but I couldn't stand it when I saw that young ruffian abusing an Esquimau. I demand that you have him arrested, and I'll appear in court against him myself for carrying concealed weapons and threatening a citizen.

"I don't propose to be treated in this way by anybody."

"Haw! haw!" cried Payton, bursting into a loud laugh.

"What's the matter now?" demanded Bellows.

"Nice time you'd hev," said Payton, "of tryin' to convict a man in this yere country of carryin' concealed weapons.

"Why, pardner, it's the only way thet we can preserve the peace."

During this short dialogue Trim stood defiantly in front of Bellows, still holding his revolvers in his hands.

The Esquimau, who had recovered consciousness partially, had his hands before his face and was leaning against the building.

"Is this the galoot thet did the business, Trim?" asked Norton, pointing to the Esquimau.

"Thet's him."

"Then why don't you sock it to him with a dose of lead an' explain matters afterward?"

"'Cause I want him to tell us about those missing papers," was Trim's response.

"Oh, ho! you've got an idee about a clew, hev ye?"

"I want the chance to talk to thet feller," said Trim; "take him inside before the row brings anybody around yere."

Bellows caught the words "missing papers" and suddenly became greatly interested.

"Has this something to do with our business, Norton?" he asked.

"I reckon it has," was the response. "An' we'd better adjourn back to the office an' talk it over."

"Before you go," said Trim, putting up his own weapons and again picking up the revolver that had been thrown away, "I jest want you to understand thet this gun was throwed away by the Esquimau when I overtook him; you can see for yourselves whether it has been fired within a few minutes."

He handed the weapon to Payton, who examined it and said:

"Five shooter, one cartridge empty, an' by the feelin' of it anybody would know thet it hed jest been fired."

"Thet's enough," said Trim. "Now take the man inside, an' we'll see what he says about it."

"You come in, too, Mr. Bellows," said Norton; "you'll find this interestin."

Trim took the Esquimau by one shoulder and Norton by the other. He kept his hands before his face and held back, but the two pushed him along and so conducted him across the street.

In the doorway of the other building was Murdock. He had come from the office with his partners, but had not gone beyond the door.

He watched the approaching group, evidently as much interested as any one. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"Why, durn me ef it ain't Cadloo!"

At this the Esquimau lowered his hands from his face and glared sullenly from Murdock to those who surrounded him.

"Know him, do you?" asked Trim.

"I should think I did," was Murdock's answer. "What are you trying to do with him?"

"Ask him what he tried to do to me," Trim retorted.

"He ain't the feller thet fired at you."

"Ain't, eh?"

"Course not."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Why, 'cause he's one of us; he's the feller that rowed me over from Taska to-day."

"Oh!"

Trim would have liked to say more, for there was a good deal upon his mind just then, but there was no need to teach him the caution exercised by trained detectives.

It was natural for him to keep his suspicions and thoughts pretty much to himself.

He took his hand from Cadloo's shoulder and remarked simply:

"Ef he rowed you over perhaps you would like to hev him row you back. Ef you do, you'd better keep your eyes on him, or he'll get away from you."

"What are you doing around yere, anyway, Cadloo?" demanded Murdock in a blustering manner.

Cadloo answered with a meaningless grunt.

Murdock's partners had crowded closely around the Esquimau the moment it became known who he was.

They were considerably excited, for their confidence in Trim was increased by his daring leap through the window into the dark and his speedy capture of the man who, without doubt, had tried to murder him.

"Thare'll be one Esquimau less in Alaska to-morrow mornin', I reckon," remarked Payton, significantly. "He ain't no friend of yours, Murdy, an' you'd better not try to back his hand."

"I ain't a-backin' nobody's hand," remarked Murdock in a low voice, "but Cadloo's a peacable feller, and there's no sense in gettin' excited about him."

"Guess you'd be excited ef you hed been shot," retorted Payton.

"Pooh!" said Murdock. "A bullet thet misses ain't no worse than a bullet thet ain't fired. Nobody's been shot."

"Ain't, eh?" exclaimed Payton. "Look at Trim's face."

All eyes were directed by this at Trim, who for the first time became conscious that blood was running down his cheek.

He put up his hand and felt the flesh there.

"It's only a scratch," he said; "jest broke the skin, but I reckon it's enough to show thet the feller meant business."

"You ain't got no call to be around yere, Cadloo," cried Murdock. "Go back to your hut."

With this he took the Esquimau by the shoulders, turned him about, and would have pushed him from the door.

The Esquimau, on his part, was only too ready to be gone, but Trim barred the way suddenly and of course was backed up by Murdock's partners.

"Cadloo don't go to his hut jest now, I dont think," said Trim, savagely.

"He won't see his hut agin nor daylight neither," added Payton.

"You don't seem to understand," said Norton, seriously, "thet Cadloo is the villain in this matter, and no mistake. You'd better stop tryin' to defend him an' help us get the truth out of him."

"Oh, well, ef you think he's guilty," returned Murdock, shrugging his shoulders, "bring him in an' examine him."

He turned about and walked back to the office, the other men following him, with Cadloo among them.

Bellows, the capitalist, came last. He had become remarkably quiet, his blustering manner was all gone, and he was now watching Trim keenly.

"That broken window," remarked Trim when they were inside, "is goin' to let in a lot of cold air, but I reckon we'll hev to stand it. Put the feller's revolver on the table!" This last was addressed to Payton, who promptly obeyed.

"Is thet yours?" asked Trim, speaking to Cadloo.

The Esquimau scowled, looked hard at the weapon, and then glanced uneasily at the men who surrounded him.

"Speak up ef you want to," said Murdock. "I ain't afraid to hev you answer thet question. The gun is mine. Yere's the mate to it."

With this he took a revolver from his belt and laid it beside the one on the table.

Trim hardly looked at Murdock. The lad was somewhat excited by his narrow escape and by the scuffle that attended his capture of the Esquimau.

He had a cool idea, nevertheless, that it would not do for him to form any suspicions just yet.

"I don't like that man Murdock a little bit," he reflected, "but the fact thet Cadloo had his revolver don't mean anything; that can probably be explained."

This reflection was justified almost immediately, for Murdock added:

"I gave Cadloo one of my guns this mornin' when I first discovered thet the safe had been robbed. I didn't know but what we was goin' to hev to fight for it with somebody, an' es he's one of the most faithful men thet ever worked for us I counted on his helpin' me. Thet's all there's to thet."

"What did you fire at this young feller fer?" demanded Payton, who was evidently aching to take part in a lynching.

The Esquimau did not reply at once, and Murdock spoke to him.

"Ef you are straight, Cadloo," he said, "you know well enough I'll stand up for you; ef you ain't, there ain't nuthin' that can help you, and you'd better answer."

"I no shoot," muttered the Esquimau.

"I told you he hadn't anything to do with it," exclaimed Murdock.

"Oh, nonsense," said Trim. "Here's your revolver thet you say yourself you gave to Cadloo. I saw him throw it across the street. He was the only man in the alley when I jumped through the window, an' there's one cartridge empty."

"What hev you got to say to thet, Cadloo?" asked Murdock.

"I walk by," replied the Esquimau, evidently very much frightened. "I hear gun; I take out pistol, for I 'fraid some man shoot me. This boy jump on me, I get scared, throw gun away, an' thet's all."

"How does it happen," Trim asked, sarcastically, "thet one cartridge in the gun is empty?"

"I shoot chicken this afternoon," Cadloo responded in a low voice.

Trim looked contemptuously at the Esquimau, and every one in the room was certain that he was lying.

"Perhaps I can straighten this out," remarked Bellows, speaking for the first time since he had come in.

"I was a little way from here and I saw these two men having what looked like a fight. They came out from beyond the shadow of the building almost together, and one went down. Then this young fellow grabbed the other by the collar and dragged him across the road. I was not afraid because I thought it was a case of some intoxicated white man abusing an Esquimau. I can see that I was mistaken, for I don't think there was any doubt, from what I heard since, that the Esquimau had tried to kill this young man."

Payton was so angry and excited that it was all he could do to keep from attacking the Esquimau on the spot.

"Let him alone," said Trim, coolly; "we'll give him one more chance."

The Esquimau looked as if he was afraid that his life was to be ended then and there, when Trim sternly asked:

"Who told you to shoot at me?"

This question surprised everybody in the room.

They became deathly silent, waiting for the Esquimau's answer.

"I shoot," he muttered after a restless glance around the room, "because I think you somebody else; I no know you; I think you somebody, that's all."

"Who told you thare was somebody yere thet you ought to shoot?" demanded Trim again.

The Esquimau shook his head and trembled so violently that he caught at the table for support.

"Search him," said Trim, "an' see ef he hes got the missin' papers about him."

Payton and Norton promptly executed Trim's command.

They found nothing whatever about the Esquimau that connected him in any way with the robbery.

"Let's string the murderin' galoot up 'thout any more talk 'bout it," cried Payton, exasperated by their failure to get the evidence they wished for.

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Trim; "let him alone."

"But sech fellers hes no business to live," urged Payton.

"Thet's right 'nough!" Trim admitted, "but ef you want me to take any hand in tryin' to find those papers you must let this feller alone and don't ask me why, either."

He spoke so sternly that Payton made no further effort to excite his companions to a lynching.

He was disappointed and evidently could not see what Trim was driving at, but his confidence in the lad was unshaken.

"When you get through with this discussion," said Trim, "we'll hand Cadloo over to the barracks, an' ef I can attend to it I'll see thet there's a charge against him on which he can be held es long es we want him.

"Meantime I want to get at the lay of the land on Taska, an' I reckon I'll go over there to-morrow."

With this he stooped over the table and began again to examine the map as quietly as if nothing had happened.

He spent a few minutes in this way, asking questions about the location of buildings upon the island, and at last said that the only way by which he could get any satisfactory idea of the case would be by going to the mine and making an examination on the spot.

The question then arose as to how he could get there, for the only mode of reaching the island was by small boats.

Payton thought that he knew of a boat that could be engaged for the purpose, and at Trim's request he went out to secure it and a crew and have it ready to sail in the early morning.

Norton suggested that they should all go along, but Trim shook his head.

"I'd rather be alone," he said; "I can get on better at the start ef thare's nobody with me, you see." He added, as if taking everybody into his confidence: "Those papers were taken by somebody who was on the island yesterday.

"Now, so far as we know about it, the only one who left the island was Murdock, yere, an' Cadloo.

"Of course Murdock didn't take the papers——"

"What's thet?" exclaimed Murdock, angrily.

"I'm simply arguin' the matter, and said of course you didn't take the papers," replied Trim.

"An' we've proven that Cadloo hasn't got 'em."

"You'd better not be too fly with your suspicions, young feller," Murdock growled.

"I hevn't said anything about suspicions," Trim responded, quietly. "I'm simply tellin' you the man who did this business is probably on the island of Taska now, an' I can probably get at him better ef I'm thare alone fer a few hours. Ef the rest of you come on half a day later it'll do no harm.

"The only business we've left to do to-night is to see thet Cadloo is locked up."

It was immediately arranged that Cadloo should be taken to the barracks, and the entire party, except Payton, who had gone to engage the boat, left the office for this purpose.

Bellows, who had been listening to the conversation very carefully, followed along and took Trim by the arm as they left the building.

The others, surrounding Cadloo, were just in front.

"You've got a cool head, young man," remarked Bellows in an undertone.

"Hev I?" returned Trim.

"Yes. And I wanted to say two things to you."

"Fire away."

"In the first place, I don't want you to feel ugly about the way I interfered with you and the Esquimau. I didn't know what was up, you see, and I admit now that I was mistaken and that you were just right; in fact, I admire your nerve and daring immensely."

"Oh, well! thet's all right; say nothing more about it."

"I won't, but this is the other thing."

He halted and tapped Trim on the chest with his forefinger as he added:

"I'll make it worth your while if you find those missing papers."

"I don't suppose I know exactly what you mean," Trim responded, "but I've already told the men, who are more interested in the papers than you are, that I would try to find them, and as I understand it, my arrangements are with them rather than with you.

"I don't pretend to be a professional detective, and in any case, no extra compensation that you could offer would make me work any harder than I shall work now for the fun of it."

Bellows looked at the lad in the utmost astonishment.

"Your language surprises me," he said. "I thought you were a wild western, uneducated boy. And you certainly did not speak like that inside there."

"Didn't I?" Trim returned, with a grin. "Perhaps I didn't, but you see, when I'm with Romans I do as Romans do.

"What was it you were going to say to me?"

Bellows still stared in astonishment at the young fellow, evidently finding it hard to realize that the chap who could fight so desperately and who was able to lead these rough men should at the same time be capable of conversing like an educated gentleman.

"We won't talk more about it now, young man," said Bellows, presently, "but I want you to see me when you get through with this undertaking, and if you find those papers I repeat that I'll make it worth your while."

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE ATTEMPT AT CAPTURE.

Bellows nodded mysteriously and left the party.

Trim continued with the miners until they had conducted Cadloo back to the barracks.

Immediately after that the lad went to bed at his hotel, for the purpose of getting as much sleep as possible before what he believed would be a hard day's work.

At sunrise he was on the sea with an Esquimau for a skipper—man and boat were new to Trim.

During his stay at Sitka he had had occasion to engage a boat for fishing and other shore excursions several times, and generally had used one particular boat. That craft now, however, was away from port, and he had been obliged to take the best that was offered to him.

The skipper was, like most of the Esquimaux, a silent fellow, and he appeared to understand less English than most of his race.

Trim gave him scarcely a thought, confining his attention wholly to the problem that would confront him when he should arrive at the island of Taska.

The wind was not only exceedingly light, but it came from the north, so that the little craft had to make a great many tacks in order to cover the course.

They passed several small islands on the way, sometimes being obliged to make a complete circuit of one in order to take advantage of the light wind which apparently changed its direction from time to time.

They had just rounded one of these little islands when Trim saw a small moving object on the water at a considerable distance; he strained his eyes to distinguish what it might be, but for a moment could no make out for a certainty. He turned to the skipper and asked:

"Is that a rowboat off there to the northwest?"

The skipper turned his head toward the northeast and looked vacantly.

"The other way," exclaimed Trim, sharply; "I said to the northwest."

The Esquimau slowly turned his head, fixed his eyes upon the distant boat, and then looked straight before him without answering.

"Well?" said Trim, impatiently.

"What?" inquired the skipper.

"I asked you if you thought that was a rowboat."

"Mebbe," was the unsatisfactory response.

"Of course it may be, but do you think it is?"

Again the Esquimau looked at the distant boat, shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"Don't know; mebbe."

Trim gave up in disgust.

"The fellow's stupid," he thought; "if he thinks it is not a boat he might just as well say so, but it don't make any difference, anyway.

"There is no reason why some natives shouldn't be out there fishing, and that's probably the case, although it does look as if the boat were being shoved along at a pretty rapid gait."

Trim occasionally glanced in the direction of the distant boat, if that was what it was, but paid no especial attention to it, and a little later another island shut it from view.

About midday Trim tried another question on the skipper.

The lad had kept a careful watch upon the course they had taken, and knowing in a general way the distance to the island of Taska, it seemed to him with all their windings that the island should be now in sight, so he pointed to a speck of land far away to the north and asked:

"Is that Taska?"

The skipper shook his head.

"Is it in sight now?"

Another shake.

"How far away are we?"

The Esquimau shrugged his shoulders, looked doubtfully, and answered:

"Don't know."

"Can't you give a guess?"

Another shake of the head.

"Say," said Trim after a pause, "do you think we'll get there to-day?"

This question was followed by a grunt which sounded as much like "yes" as anything else, and Trim had to be satisfied with it.

He sat forward in the boat and most of the time kept his eyes ahead.

The wind was now blowing in such a way that they could pursue an almost direct northern course, and after noting that there was a considerable stretch of open sea before them, across which the boat was pointed, he stretched himself out upon the little forward deck and idly watched a flock of gulls circling overhead.

He had been lying thus perhaps a quarter of an hour, when the irregular motion of the boat caused him to look up and around quickly.

He saw at once that the course had been considerably changed, and that they were now heading directly for an island that lay to the east of the course which he believed to be the right one.

The change in the motion of the boat had been due to cutting across the waves at a different angle than had been the case before.

"Well," said Trim, "is that Taska?"

A grunt from the Esquimau seemed to mean yes, and Trim looked with lively interest at the nearing land.

"That doesn't seem to be like the land described on Murdock's map," thought Trim. "But I suppose it is, and that before long I shall see the buildings connected with the mine."

A moment later he said to himself:

"Either this is not Taska or Murdock's map is all wrong, for according to the map there should be some kind of a dock and a small building on this southern shore. I can't see any sign of a dock now."

He looked over his shoulder at the skipper, and saw that the Esquimau was holding the boat steadily on her course, evidently with the intention of landing upon this island.

"Are you sure that's Taska?" Trim inquired.

There was again an unintelligible grunt.

Trim might have demanded a clearer answer to his question if it had not been that just then the boat heeled far over as a little gust of wind struck it, and for a moment it rocked violently upon the waves.

Trim saw what the trouble was. The water was getting shallow as they neared the shore, and that made the waves rougher. The land also caused the wind to blow irregularly, and the skipper apparently was not attending carefully enough to his work.

At the same moment, too, the foresail sheet gave way, leaving the sail flapping and making it possible that if another gust of wind should come unexpectedly the boat would capsize.

Knowing just what had to be done, Trim gave up any attempt to question the skipper, but crept out upon the little bowsprit, caught the sail and with considerable difficulty made it fast again.

It was the one thing to do at the time, and while it was being done there was no possibility of questioning the skipper.

It took so much time that when at last the sail was made fast again the boat was very near the shore.

A glance in that direction showed Trim that there was a rowboat hauled up on the beach.

This showed that the land was occupied, and the probabilities seemed, therefore, that it really was the island of Taska.

"See here!" Trim cried, "where do you intend to land?"

"Look out," the Esquimau responded; "we land pretty quick."

As he said this the skipper threw the

helm over, and the boat changed her course so suddenly that Trim was almost thrown overboard.

He caught the main sheet and thus held on for an instant, silently growling at the stupidity of the skipper.

"He doesn't seem to know how to sail a boat," Trim thought; "he'll have the craft aground before he knows what's happened."

The thought was hardly formed in Trim's mind when the boat did indeed go aground with a jolt that threw Trim upon his knees.

The Esquimau let go of the tiller and jumped into the low surf.

"Must pull ashore now," he cried as he ran through the water and laid hold of the boat's prow.

Under ordinary circumstances Trim would have jumped in also without any hesitation and would have helped to bring the boat toward the beach; as it was, he threw himself upon the seat in the stern and quietly prepared both his revolvers for action.

He did not like the way his skipper acted, and it seemed to him necessary to prepare for trouble.

The fact that Trim sat in the stern enabled the Esquimau to drag the boat several feet farther toward shore, and as he was doing this two men came running from among the trees a little way up the island slope.

They were white men, and none that Trim had ever seen before; they stopped at the water's edge and looked on for a moment.

Trim's skipper paused in his work long enough to wave his arm toward the men, whereupon one of them ran to the rowboat that lay out of the water, took a rope from it, and tossed it to the Esquimau.

The latter made it fast to a ring bolt in the prow of the boat, and the two men on shore prepared to drag the boat farther up; it was even then grating upon the bottom.

Up to this time Trim had not spoken a word. Now he sung out:

"Hold on a minute!"

The men on shore looked at him curiously and the Esquimau turned around with an inquiring expression.

"Is this the island of Taska?" asked Trim.

At this the Esquimau quickly turned his head toward the shore. The two men who seemed to be surprised at the question, looked first at one another and then at the Esquimau, and at last one of them responded:

"It's all right, stranger. Come along!"

With this they began to pull again.

"No, you don't," Trim shouted. "Let go, there, or there'll be trouble."

The men paused an instant, and Trim took pains to hold his revolver in such a way that they could see the gleam of its barrel.

The Esquimau said something in a low voice which Trim could not understand; the boat was but a few yards from the shore line, but the noise of the surf drowned the sound of voices unless the men spoke in shouts.

"Yes, this is the island of Taska, right enough, stranger," called one of the men.

The other added:

"You'd best let's drag you on shore, or you'll get spilt."

"Well," thought Trim, "if this is Taska, the less fuss I make about landing the better."

So he leaned back in the boat as if he was satisfied, and the men began to pull.

In two or three seconds the boat was high enough on the beach to be out of danger of capsizing; then the two on shore made their end of the rope fast around a stump and stepped down to the water's edge, where they could climb on board if they wished to without so much as wetting their feet.

Trim still sat in the stern seat. They looked at him expectantly, while the Esquimau stood with his back to Trim.

The lad was quite certain that the skipper was saying something to the two men in whispers.

"If this is Taska," said Trim, "thar must be a mine around here somewhars, ain't thar?"

"Oh, yes," responded one of the men, promptly. "It's jest over the ridge thar."

He jerked his thumb toward the centre of the island.

"Come along, and we'll show it to you," said the other.

Trim slowly rose and walked toward

the forward part of the boat; apparently he had put up his revolvers, for his hands appeared to be empty.

The Esquimau stood aside as Trim approached, and the two men stood close to the prow with their arms akimbo.

Trim seemed to be in no hurry; he paused a moment just as he came in front of the mast and asked:

"How far away is the mine?"

There was something in the expression upon these rough men's faces to make him feel that the utmost caution was necessary.

His prudence was justified almost instantly.

The expression on one of the men's faces changed to a look of ferocity as he leaped toward the boat with outstretched arms and cried:

"Come ashore, you tenderfoot, an' we'll show you."

Taking the cue from his companion, the other man also leaped to the boat, and both evidently would have laid violent hands upon Trim and carried him ashore by main force.

Trim stepped back with a light laugh, thus avoiding their clutch, and at the same instant brought his hands up and down with the motion so familiar to him, but so startling to his enemies.

"I wouldn't be in a hurry," he remarked, grimly, and both men seemed to conclude very suddenly that there was nothing to hurry about so much as getting out of the range of the two revolvers that were pointed at them.

They leaped back to shore, and as they did so Trim could see that one of them was reaching for his belt.

"Stop that!" the young fellow commanded, and he explained his command by sending a bullet that tore a hole in the sleeve of the fellow who was about to draw his gun.

This warning shot had the desired effect. Both men stood still and threw up their hands without waiting for the command to do so.

"Now," said Trim, "you two fellows hev got to speak the truth or be bored where you stand.

"This is not the island of Taska, is it?"

"No, 'tain't," muttered one of the men.

"Whar does it lie?"

" 'Bout five miles to the north."

"Thet's all right, then; stand whar you are. You," addressing his skipper, "climb on board!"

Trim knew that the Esquimau was unarmed and too much of a coward to make any attempt at a fight.

The order was obeyed promptly. While the Esquimau was getting to his place in the stern of the boat, Trim kept his eyes and weapons upon the white men.

"Now," he said, "come forward, you two, cast off this line and shove the boat out.

"The first sign that either of you makes of crookedness will be his last move."

The men's swarthy faces were pale with fear. There could be no doubt that this stern young fellow on board the little boat meant what he said.

"It's all a mistake, stranger," muttered one of them as he advanced to obey the command.

"See thet you make it right, then," was Trim's only response.

He stood with his back against the mast, so that he was out of reach of any treacherous movement they might make.

The line was cast loose quickly, and both men put their shoulders to the boat's prow to push it back into the water.

As the tide was rising and the boat was light, there was no great difficulty in effecting this; so that in a few seconds the craft floated again and the sail caught the wind.

Trim turned as the boat filled away so as to keep his revolvers pointed toward the white men; he stood thus without asking questions or giving any farther commands until the boat had gone so far from shore as to be out of range of pistol shots.

"Now, then," he said, sitting down upon the forward deck and addressing the skipper, "you make for the island of Taska, and if the next land you strike is not the right place your voyage will stop there; you'll die of an overdose of lead, understand?"

The Esquimau shivered. It was plain enough that he understood his passenger's threat.

"All a mistake," he muttered.

Trim grunted contemptuously and made no response.

"There's been some treachery at work here," he said to himself, "and the time will come when I shall find out all about it and learn something about the real character of those men on that little island."

From that time on the skipper made a straight course, and late in the afternoon a landing was made at Taska.

CHAPTER V.

A HOLE IN THE SAFE DOOR.

A group of laborers, white men and Esquimaux, gathered at the rough dock as the boat approached.

Most of them spoke to the skipper familiarly, as if they knew him, and all of them eyed the young passenger curiously.

"Well, boys," said Trim in an offhand way, as he stepped ashore, "this yere is the island of Taska, I'm told, and I hear thet thar's a mine somewhars around yere thet can be bought for good money."

The men heard him in silence, and there was a considerable pause before anybody responded. At last one of the white men said:

"We reckon you'll find the man you want to talk business to you up to the super's office."

This struck Trim as being rather a curious remark, and in fact the action of the entire party seemed to him to be peculiar.

"Whare is the super's office?" he asked.

He knew, in fact, exactly where it was, because his study of Murdock's map made him familiar with the little island.

"Over the hill thare," the men replied, pointing inland.

"Show me the way, will you, pardner?" Trim asked, addressing this question to one of the men who to his keen eye seemed most likely to prove a useful acquaintance.

"We'll all go along with you together," this man responded, and they did.

Trim and the man to whom he had spoken went ahead, and the rest trailed on behind.

"Kind of a lonesome spot up yere," said Trim, by way of beginning conversation.

"Kind of," was the only reply.

"Hev any difficulty of gettin' supplies from the mainland in the winter months?"

"Some."

"Any good shootin' yereabout?"

"Duck an' other water fowl."

"Don't you get snowed in sometimes in the winter?"

"Some."

"Well," thought Trim, "there's no use tryin' to get much out of this feller, at least not now. Perhaps the row that Murdock kicked up here yesterday morning has scared them all."

They walked on a few paces in silence, and then Trim, who had quietly counted the men in the group, asked:

"Are all the men who work in the mine yere now?"

"Most of 'em," was the unsatisfactory reply.

Just then they came to the top of the hill, and Trim saw a man approaching them slowly from the direction of the superintendent's office.

In an instant Trim understood what had happened to make the miners so dumb.

The man approaching them was Murdock.

"He has stolen a march on me," thought Trim; "now, there is something crooked in that fellow, or I've no business to take this kind of a job."

Murdock quickened his pace when he saw the group approaching and came up with a pretense at friendliness.

"Hello, Trim!" he said. "I got yere ahead of you."

"I see you did," Trim responded.

"You came in a slow boat," continued Murdock, "an' I tell you in this kind of weather sails ain't no account compared with oars."

"Did you row yourself?"

"Oh, no! I hired an Esquimau to do thet."

"How long hev you been yere?"

"About two hours."

Trim was disgusted and disappointed. He had hoped that he could make an investigation on the spot without letting any of the men on the island suspect what he was up to.

Now he felt certain that Murdock had informed them of his coming, and that this explained their curiosity and silence.

Murdock turned around and walked beside Trim, while the others fell back.

"I hope you've not given your men the tip thet I was comin'?" said Trim in a low voice. "I told you I wanted to start in alone."

"Oh, I hevn't said a word," replied Murdock. "I've kept just es mum es an oyster. Probably they think you're some feller with a roll es wants to buy the mine, see?"

"All right," Trim responded, but he added to himself:

"Murdock takes too much pains to tell me thet he hesn't given these fellers the tip. He's crooked somehow, es sure as a gun."

"Well," said Trim, aloud, after a moment, "I'll tell you frankly thet I'm sorry you came up, but thet can't be helped now."

"Why, I ain't goin' to stand in your way!" protested Murdock. "I thought likely es how I could help you a bit."

"Did the others know you were comin'?"

"Certainly. Norton and the rest thought it would be a good idee, so I started after you did, knowin' well enough by the way the winds were I would get yere ahead of you."

"I don't believe it," thought Trim.

"Anything happened?" he asked, aloud.

"Not a thing. The men, of course, know thare was a robbery, an' thet it's a serious thing, for I made thet clear enough yesterday mornin', but so far es I know thare hes been nothin' found; the safe an' the office is just es I left 'em."

"Hes anybody left the island?"

"Not a soul."

By this time they arrived at the superintendent's office, and Murdock led the way inside.

It was a small building, a story and a half in height, and there was only one room upon the ground floor.

At one side there was a shed which answered to the room beside the safe referred to by Murdock when he was explaining the robbery to his partners.

It was the room in which he had said that he had passed the night.

The office was furnished with an ordinary plain table and two or three chairs, and a small old-fashioned iron safe was the only other article of importance in the room.

"Thare's the article you're interested in," Murdock remarked, pointing to the safe.

Trim approached it and knelt down.

It was evident that the lock had been blown to pieces by blasting powder. The charge had been a small one, just sufficient to dislocate the bolts and the combination apparatus.

A small hole had been drilled in from the outside, through which apparently the powder had been poured.

"It is plain enough how it was done, you see," Murdock said, and he, too, knelt beside the safe.

"You probably know thet the workin' of a steel drill wouldn't make any noise, an' in consequence I didn't hear it. At any rate, I slept right through it all, and es for the blast itself, why, I reckon thare wasn't powder enough used to make much of a racket, 'specially when you consider thet the sound of it would be deadened when it went off on the inside of the safe."

"I see," Trim responded.

Murdock went on talking, saying nothing new and repeating in one way and another how the job must have been done.

Trim let him talk for a while and then asked:

"Whare are the tools with which the job was done?"

"You mean the drill?" Murdock asked. "I give it up."

Trim stood up and looked around the room.

In a corner on the floor was a small pile of quartz that had been blasted from the mine. The pieces of rock were kept there, apparently, to exhibit to visitors, for it was evident at a glance that they contained ore in considerable quantities.

"Suppose you look around and see ef you can find the drill," said Trim; "it might be among those stones thare."

"I reckon not," Murdock replied, doubtfully, but he neverthless went to the quartz and began to pull it over.

The moment he was thus occupied Trim stooped over again opposite the safe, and taking a slender lead pencil from his pocket inserted it in the hole that had been drilled into the iron door just below the lock.

It was the work of but a second, but it meant a great deal to the young detective.

When the lead pencil had been pushed into the end of the hole, Trim closed his thumb and forefinger upon it at the point where it came out from the safe; then he drew out the pencil, and holding his finger and thumb in the same place, laid the pencil against the iron door. This proved what he had already suspected.

The hole was not drilled far enough into the iron to reach the cavity in which the lock was placed.

In other words, no powder could have been poured into the safe through that hole, and Trim instantly concluded that the hole had been drilled after the explosion and not before it.

"Crooked, crooked, crooked," he said to himself as he placed his pencil in his pocket.

Murdock, who had not noticed the operation, at this moment uttered an exclamation of surprise and took a small drill and bit stock from underneath the quartz, and said:

"By gum! young feller, you hit it right."

Trim smiled.

"That was a pretty good guess," he said to himself.

Trim took the drill from Murdock's hands and examined it carefully.

He put his fingers upon the tip of the drill. He could not be certain about it, but it did seem as if the drill was warmer than a bit of unused steel ought to be lying in that room where there was no fire.

"If I'm not mistaken," he said to himself, "this drill has not yet cooled off from the heat it took on while making that hole in the safe.

"I can't be certain about it, however, and I mustn't make any mistake by jumping before I know where I'm going to land.

"Suppose, as I suspect, that Murdock took those papers and that he drilled this hole afterward to make it appear that the safe had been robbed, what then?

"Why, in the first place, he isn't going to own up to it, and if he's got the papers concealed, he isn't going to tell where the papers are or give them up.

"I'm not going to gain anything by letting him see that I suspect him or that I doubt his word.

"Besides all that, I may be mistaken. In any case, it don't stand to reason that those papers are at the present moment anywhere on this island where they can be easily found."

While thinking thus, Trim was examining the drill. After a time he handed it back to Murdock and remarked:

"I believe you said that nobody had left the island?"

"Thet's right."

"Well, then this thing must have been done by somebody who is now on the island, unless the robber came yere in the night in a boat an' went away again immediately after crackin' the safe."

"Thet's quite likely," said Murdock, eagerly.

"I don't think so," Trim returned, coolly.

"It isn't likely," Murdock persisted, "thet any of these men would dare blow up the safe with me sleepin' right alongside of it."

"No, but somebody dared," said Trim. "Hev all the men lined up in front of the office an' let me look 'em over."

"All of 'em?"

"Yes."

"I don't know es they are all——"

Murdock hesitated.

"Some of 'em may be in the shaft now," he added, awkwardly.

"Send for 'em, then."

Murdock placed the drill upon the table and left the office.

The group of workmen were still in front of the little building. Trim had seen at the start that there were six white men and five Esquimaux among them.

He saw Murdock go out and give a command to one, who hurried away in the direction of the shaft; a moment later this one returned in company with three

Esquimaux; when they were on hand, Murdock came in and said:

"Thar you are, Trim; thet's the whole population of Taska outside waitin' for you to look at 'em."

CHAPTER V.

A FROZEN THUMB FOR A PLUG.

Trim went to the door and glanced at the men.

"You see they are all yere," Murdock said, nervously.

"Yes," said Trim. "I remember you said last night thet thar were nine Esquimaux and six white men besides yourself on the island."

"Thet's it."

"An' I see," Trim continued, "thet thar are six white men yere and eight Esquimaux."

"Exactly," Murdock responded, with some eagerness, "an' the missin' one, of course, is Cadloo, who's locked up in the Sitka barracks."

"Thet's right," Trim responded; "but what's the chap who rowed you over from Sitka to-day?"

"Who?"

"Whar's the man thet rowed you from Sitka?"

"Why," Murdock replied, "he must have gone back."

Trim looked sharply at Murdock and then said: "Stay yere a minute!" and left the office.

Murdock would have followed, but Trim closed the door in such a way that Murdock was left inside.

Speaking quickly, so that Murdock might not have time to interrupt, Trim said:

"Which of you rowed Mr. Murdock up yere from Sitka to-day?"

"Me," said one of the Esquimaux, promptly.

"Come yere!"

The Esquimau stepped from the line readily and approached Trim. The latter opened the door of the office and told the Esquimau to step inside.

Murdock scowled darkly at this maneuvre, but presently recovered his presence of mind and exclaimed, as if in great surprise:

"Great Scott! but these Esquimaux look so much alike thet I didn't notice thet fellow who rowed me was in the gang thar."

"Well, you recognize him now, don't you?" asked Trim, sharply.

"Yes, I do."

"And you know what thet means?"

"I don't know whether I do or not, young feller."

Murdock said this in rather a savage tone, and Trim responded, quietly:

"You needn't get hot about it ef you would help me es you say you are——"

"Well, I be," interrupted Murdock.

"All right, then; tell me where your missing man is."

"Missin' man?" repeated Murdock, blankly.

"Certainly. Thar should be eight Esquimaux in your company besides the one who rowed you here, you understand?"

"Well, let's see," hesitated Murdock. "Thar's Cadloo, and he's now behind the bars——"

"Come! come!" interrupted Trim, impatiently. "It don't need no figurin' to show thet thar's a man gone out of this lot; nor was he gone when you came yere."

"I s'pose he must hev been," said Murdock, slowly.

"Who was he, then? What's his name and what hes he gone for?"

Murdock opened the door and looked out at the waiting group.

"He acts," thought Trim, "es ef he was tryin' to fight for time."

Murdock stood in the door for a moment and then said:

"Boys, where's Amorak?"

The men, Esquimaux and whites as well, looked at each other without replying.

"Whar's Amorak?" repeated Murdock.

The Esquimaux stood motionless and the whites shifted about uneasily; at last one of them said: "I dunno," and he glanced queerly at Trim, who was looking at them from beside Murdock.

"See here, Murdock," exclaimed Trim, sternly, "this farce hes got to come to an end! One of your men is missin' an' he's got to be found.

"I'm in this business to find him and

the missin' papers which I believe are in his possession. Ef you don't care to help to find him, I'll go 'bout it my own way."

"By thunder, Trim, I think you're right!" cried Murdock, changing his whole manner. "It's Amorak who did this whole business, and no mistake. I hadn't thought of it before, but jest now it's come over me.

"Come inside, an' I'll tell you."

He pushed the boatman from the room and closed the door, and continued, excitedly:

"Amorak is Cadloo's brother!"

"Indeed!"

"Certainly. An' Amorak is the only feller among the workmen who's at all mischievous.

"We never hed much to complain of 'bout him, but I do remember thet he's appeared discontented lately; he wanted more wages an' wanted to get a month's advance, and so on.

"I couldn't advance him any stuff, an' thet probably explains why he took to stealin'. Now, then, don't you see?"

Murdock became quite excited as he continued his argument.

"Amorak probably did this business, and gave the tip to Cadloo before we started for Sitka. Then, don't you see, Cadloo, knowin' a detective was engaged to investigate the matter, thought thet he must put you out of the way to save his brother, see?"

Trim was not at all convinced by this argument, but he felt that there was at least this in it: that the missing man, Amorak, had possession of the papers.

"It don't make any difference now," he thought, "whether Cadloo was trying to defend his brother or whether he was put up to the job by somebody else, but the fact seems to be pretty certain that Amorak has gotten away with those papers.

"The thing for me to do, then, is to find Amorak."

Aloud he said:

"You want to stir around lively now and find where your man Amorak has gone."

Murdock immediately dashed out of doors and questioned his men excitedly.

Trim followed him, and speedily learned that Amorak had left the island two or three hours before.

Some of the men seemed to think that he had gone previously to Murdock's return, others that he had gone just after it.

The one fact that was certain was that Amorak had started in a rowboat, and had headed toward a point on the mainland a few miles away where there was a small Esquimau settlement called Vilnak.

Trim made certain that Amorak had gone alone; then he said to Murdock:

"I'm goin' to this town of Vilnak right away."

With this Trim started back toward the dock where he had left his boat and his skipper in charge of it.

He had gone but a few paces before he halted and remarked:

"Thare's no wind at all now, and my boat is too big for rowing. I suppose you've got plenty more yere?"

"Oh, yes," replied Murdock; "we can fix you out with a boat easy enough."

"Do it, then, and give me a man who's a good oarsman."

Murdock seemed to be very umch in earnest now. He hurried around giving orders to the various men, who started away to execute them.

"The boat will be ready for you in ten minutes, Trim," Murdock said, presently. "Better come in and get a bite of sumthin' to eat before you start."

"I'm not hungry," Trim responded. "I had all I wanted on board."

"Well, but come into the office a minute," Murdock insisted. "I want to show you something."

"Will it take ten minutes to get a boat ready?" Trim asked.

"Yes, about thet. I want to give you the best boat we've got, and thar's some things in it thet will hev to be unloaded. You'll save time by takin' thet boat, for it's the fastest one in the lot."

Trim was sorry that there should be any delay whatever, but as long as he was going to get a swift boat that would save him time in the long run there was nothing to do but to wait.

So he went into the office again.

"What do you want to show me?" he asked.

"Why," said Murdock, "thar's the safe right in thet corner, an' this door yere leads into the shed whar my bunk is."

Murdock opened the shed door and showed Trim his sleeping quarters.

"Now, then," Murdock continued, "you can see just how 'tis. I'm a sound sleeper, an' 'twould be easy enough for Amorak, who knows the lay of the land perfectly, to come in yere an' drill thet hole; then he could touch off the charge and skip out until he could see whether the noise woke me up, an' the blast goin' off on the inside of the safe, you see, would not make much of a noise, anyway——"

"You've told me all this before," interrupted Trim.

"Well, perhaps I hev, but I wanted you to be satisfied."

"I am satisfied," Trim responded. "I reckon I'll go down to the boat and help 'em unload."

"I don't believe thar's no good of hurryin'," Murdock remarked.

Trim believed that there was need of hurry. He left the office and walked rapidly up the slope, from the top of which he could see two Esquimaux at work in a small boat that was lying half out of the water. No others of the men were in that vicinity.

Murdock, who had come along behind Trim, shouted, loudly:

"Are you most ready, thar?"

The Esquimaux looked up, threw one or two articles out of the boat, and pushed it into the water.

Trim ran down the hill and got into the boat at once. One of the Esquimaux sat in the middle seat with the oars in his hand.

"Now you're off," said Murdock, and he gave the boat a shove which sent it several feet from the shore.

The Esquimau began rowing at once as Murdock called after them:

"Good luck to you! I hope you'll find Amorak!"

"You row as fast as you can," said Trim to his oarsman, "an' I'll give you more money when we get to the mainland than you every saw before in your life."

The Esquimau looked at Trim in what seemed to be a frightened way and responded in a grunt.

He was rowing, at the time, apparently as hard as he could, and the boat was making good progress.

Trim looked over his shoulder, and saw that Murdock and the other Esquimau were making their way up the hill. A moment later they had got beyond the summit.

Trim looked across the water toward the mainland, and then again turned his eyes toward the island of Taska.

He was thinking over the many things that Murdock had said and done, and was beginning to wonder if it were not possible that Murdock had sent him off on a wild-goose chase after this man Amorak, when suddenly the oarsman gave a cry of alarm and began to change the direction of the boat.

"What's the matter?" said Trim, facing about.

The Esquimau did not stop rowing, but glanced down at the bottom of the boat.

Trim looked, too, and saw that the craft was leaking rapidly. Water was already over the soles of his boots.

"We drown!" cried the Esquimau, excited. "Boat sink before we get two mile."

The oarsman was putting the boat about with the intention of returning to the island.

"Hold on a minute!" cried Tirm. "Keep the course as she is."

"We drown!" repeated the Esquimau.

"Well, if we drown," returned Trim, "we'll drown together. Head for the mainland, you rascal, or I'll blow your brains out."

The Esquimau uttered a cry of horror as he saw his passenger aiming a revolver at him.

"We drown! we drown!" he stammered, but he kept on rowing, nevertheless.

"Head for the mainland!" Trim commanded, sternly.

The Esquimau, who was trembling with excitement and fear, obeyed.

As soon as the boat was again directed on its proper course, Trim knelt upon the bottom and felt with his bare hand along the planks for the leak. He had already suspected what was the matter, and presently his fingers came upon an auger hole.

"That was what was the matter," he said to himself. "I know I'm on the right track now. Amorak has got those papers. Murdock knows it!

"He wants to give Amorak as good a start of me as possible, and for that reason he had a hole bored through the bottom of this boat so that we should have to lose half an hour or so in turning to shore to get a new one.

"All right, Mr. Murdock. Now that I know that the papers are not on the island of Taska, but are in the possession of this man Amorak, I'm not going ashore even if the boat has been scuttled."

Thinking thus and watched with growing alarm by the excited Esquimau, Trim was feeling farther along the planking.

He feared that he might find a second auger hole, in which case his plan for continuing the journey would be upset.

He did not find one.

His haste in leaving the office had prevented the Esquimau from boring more than one hole.

While he was thus searching he had not been able to give his attention to the oarsman, and when he looked up again he saw that the Esquimau was making another attempt to put the boat about and head for Taska.

Again Trim brought his revolver into play.

"You make for the mainland," he cried, "or I'll stuff a part of your worthless body into this hole!"

There was not enough water in the boat at that time to make any very great difference in her speed, but there was quite enough to chill the passenger as he knelt in it.

He had thrust his left thumb into the auger hole, while in his right hand he held the revolver pointed at the oarsman.

"Now," said Trim, "there's no more water coming into this boat. If you capsize her or play any trick on me, I'll put a bullet into you before you can drown! The best thing for your health is to keep on rowing."

Convinced, at last, that his passenger meant business, the Esquimau strained at the oars with all his might, and Trim had the satisfaction of seeing that the boat was making progress.

He kept his revolver raised for a moment or two, and then laid it down upon the seat behind him and looked around the boat for something with which he could make a plug for the auger hole.

There was nothing whatever there that could be used for such a purpose.

He thought how easy it would be to wind a handkerchief around a thole pin and stuff it into the hole, but the only thole pins on board were those fitted into the Esquimau's oars.

There was not so much as a sliver of loose wood at command.

"If there was only time for it," Trim reflected, "I could whittle a plug from one of the seats, but while I am doing that the boat would half fill with water.

"If there was a pail here I might bail her out.

"It might be possible to cram a handkerchief into this hole, but the pressure of the water would probably push it away, and in any case there would be a leak.

"The only thing that I can do is to hold my thumb here until we get to land, for my thumb is the only plug that I can use that completely fits the hole."

Even as he came to this conclusion, Trim shivered violently with the cold.

It was late in autumn, and in that far north region the water was almost like ice.

The intense cold may be understood better when it is stated that there had been snow flurries upon the previous day, and that even now a few flakes were falling.

It was not long before Trim's thumb ceased to pain him. It was thoroughly numb with cold, but his knees and the rest of his body ached and quivered with it.

It seemed to him that he could not stand the pain any longer, and yet as he glanced over his shoulder at the island of Taska he saw that the boat had not made anywhere near half the distance to the mainland.

CHAPTER VII.

A NIGHT IN AN ESQUIMAU HUT.

"You freeze," said the Esquimau when Trim looked around again.

"Keep on rowing, you lubber," cried Trim, reaching again for his revolver.

The Esquimau had rested on his oars, evidently in the expectation that his passenger would order him to give up the attempt to reach the mainland.

He dug his oars into the water again with great vim, in obedience to the lad's command. But there was an expression of deep terror on his face.

"Me tell you," he stammered, hardly able to make himself heard, so great was his fright—"me tell you something."

"Speak up, then," commanded Trim, "but stick to your work."

"You freeze," the Esquimau said, with short pauses between the words. "Hand freeze — all freeze—same dead — half hour."

"Well," returned Trim, "if my hand freezes and I freeze with it and I become a dead man in an hour, I reckon that's my business, ain't it?"

The Esquimau shuddered.

"You no can stand it," he exclaimed, rowing all the time for dear life.

"Bymeby you feel great pain—you give up—you take hand out hole—water come in—then we be in middle—no way throw water overboard—no get mainland —no get Taska—both drown."

Trim smiled, in spite of the pain he felt, at the Esquimau's way of explaining the situation.

"I tell you what it is, my friend," he said, less sternly than he had spoken before, "this pain is considerable, I'll allow that, and I'm not enjoying myself a little bit, but I'll give you a tip about me that perhaps you can understand.

"I ain't made of the kind of stuff that gives up. I'm goin' to hold my thumb in this yere hole until this boat gets to the mainland, if I freeze to death on the way.

"You'll be safe enough; you'll be simply rowin' a dead man instead of a live one, see?"

"No like it," returned the Esquimau.

"Like it or not, you've got to keep on rowing," retorted Trim.

"I know perfectly well that if I take my hand out of this hole when we're in the middle of the strait we'll sink before we can reach land in either direction, so don't you fret. I'm goin' to stay where I am, an' ef you don't like the idee of luggin' a corpse to shore, you want to put on more steam. That's all."

It is not probable that the Esquimau, with his imperfect knowledge of English, understood all that Trim said, but he gathered enough from it to be certain that the lad would stick to his post, and that the only safety for either of them, therefore, was to get to the mainland as soon as possible.

So the journey continued, the Esquimau rowing until the perspiration started from every pore, and Trim kneeling in the water and feeling a terrible numbness overcoming all his muscles.

Men never know how much they can endure until they have been put to some terrible test.

Before this journey was finished, Trim felt that he would give all that he was ever likely to possess if he could only take his thumb from the auger hole and throw himself down full length upon dry land.

The agony became so great that during the last quarter of the trip he was hardly conscious of what was going on.

He knew simply that he was like a cake of ice, with the exception of his face, on which the extreme pain caused the sweat to gather. His forehead was hot; the rest of his body seemed to be frozen.

He was dimly conscious, too, that the light snowfalls that had occurred earlier in the day had now turned to a heavy downpour.

By the time they reached the shore the Esquimau was as white as a snow man, and at last, when the boat grated on the pebbly beach and the Esquimau leaped into the low surf to drag it ashore, Trim did not rise. He was so chilled and so stiffened from being so long in one position that he could not rise, and, moreover, he had come so near actual freezing that his mind was in that curious condition where he did not seem to care much whether or not he should survive his adventure.

The thought of his undertaking came vaguely to his brain, and with a desperate desire to be up and after Amorak and the missing papers, he made a feeble attempt to move and failed utterly.

It was the dusk of evening when the boat touched the mainland.

The Esquimaux living in Vilnak had

seen it crossing the water, and as it drew near their curiosity was aroused by the crouching figure of the passenger, as well as by the evident struggle that the oarsman was making to cover the distance in short time.

It happened, therefore, that several natives were on the beach when the boat arrived, and when the oarsman excitedly explained the situation, they promptly jumped into the boat and lifted Trim from his place.

He tried to speak to them, but only a choking sound issued from his throat.

The Esquimaux are, on the whole, a kindly race, and these people stopped to ask no questions, but set to work in the best way they knew to restore the young fellow to consciousness.

One of them hurried off to the village, which consisted of less than a dozen huts, at a little distance, while the others proceeded to roll Trim in the snow.

After they had rolled him over and over several times, they placed him on his back and began to rub his hands and face with snow with great violence.

Trim made no resistance to this rough treatment. It was effective speedily in restoring his consciousness partly, and as he became able to think he realized that this was the surest way to prevent him from being frozen throughout.

He knew to get warm quickly after a terrible chill was almost as dangerous as not to get warm at all, so although the rubbing and rolling caused him to feel the sharpest pains throughout his whole body, he stood it patiently, closing his eyes and grating his teeth hard together to prevent any outcry.

The one who had gone to the huts returned presently with a flask of liquor. A long draught from this finished the work of restoration, and suddenly Trim sat up and remarked:

"I'm all right now, an' I'm much obliged to you."

An old man who was kneeling before him shook his head gravely.

"No all right yet," he said, "blankets—sleep all night—then safe—perhaps."

"We'll see about thet," returned Trim as he rose to his feet.

The effort was too much for him, and he would have fallen had not two of the Esquimaux caught him.

"Well," he exclaimed, with a weak laugh, "I do seem to be pretty well done up."

Realizing that in order to accomplish his mission it would be necessary to regain his entire strength, and that he would risk everything by going ahead too fast, he permitted the kindly Esquimaux to lead him to a hut, where they laid him upon a bunk and covered him with thick blankets.

This was after they had provided him with a dry suit of clothes, which were ill fitting and outlandish in appearance, but which were very necessary for his recovery.

Trim felt exceedingly drowsy, but he was not going to sleep before he had learned something about Amorak.

He had little doubt that his oarsman would tell the purpose of his trip to Vilnak, and he suspected that these Esquimaux might be loyal enough to Amorak to try to injure the pursuer during the night.

It was a serious situation for the lad. Here he was almost helpless, too weak from his severe exposure to move without help, and surrounded by a strange race who, in all probability, would be extremely hostile to him.

He had so much confidence in his own shrewdness that this latter thought really gave him less trouble than the fear that, whatever else the Esquimaux did, they would help Amorak to escape.

"Of course he'll get the tip," thought Trim, "from that rascally oarsman, an' starting from yere, he's got all of North America to hide in.

"What can I do about it?"

The hut in which he lay had been deserted by its inmates after they had laid the stranger on the bed and wrapped him up; they supposed, of course, that he would go at once to sleep.

Trim could hear the dull murmur of their voices outside. If they had been speaking in English he would not have been able to understand a word they said, but more than that, they were conversing in their own language.

"If they would only come in here and do their jabbering, I might be able to make something of it, but they might as well be in Asia and talking Siamese for all the good I can get out of it now.''

During his few weeks in Alaska the lad had given a good deal of study to the Esquimau tongue, following the habit that he had adopted early in his travels of learning the language of every country that he visited.

He was by no means perfect in Esquimau, and seldom made any attempt to speak it, but he had learned enough of the language to get the sense of a general conversation.

''The probability is,'' so his thoughts ran, ''that the entire population of this place is holding a caucus just outside the door.

''This is, of course, the place where they would gather, for I'm the most interesting topic for discussion that they have just now.

''I must manage somehow to find out what they are saying.''

He half sat up, propping himself upon his elbow. Just as he did so the outside door was opened on a crack, and the old man who had taken charge upon the lad's arrival peered in.

Trim promptly lay down again and pretended to be asleep.

The old man gazed at him steadily for a moment, then withdrew and closed the door. This action gave Trim new energy.

He got up from the bunk, and wrapping the blankets closely about him, crept softly across the floor to the door, where he lay for a moment listening.

The sound of voices was much more distinct here, and after listening a moment he heard the words in Esquimau:

''There's Nak coming now; he can tell us.''

''Nak!'' thought Trim. ''Oh, yes, that's the name of the fellow that rowed me across from Taska. I should like to dictate what Nak will tell them, but I guess it will be better not to make a row until I'm able to take care of myself.

''I must hear what he says, though.''

Confident that the Esquimau believed him to be asleep, Trim cautiously opened the door about an inch, and held it so that the wind could not possibly close it.

Then he could hear the conversation of the Esquimaux clearly. They were evidently huddled close to the hut, in order to avoid as much of the snow as they could.

''Well, Nak,'' said one of them after a moment, ''what is it all about?''

''Is he alive?'' was Nak's response.

A voice that Trim recognized as the old man's answered, with a grunt:

''Alive—yes. And he'll be lively by morning.''

''What's he here for?'' asked another voice.

It was evident that Nak was hesitating. Instead of replying directly, he asked another question:

''Where's Amorak?''

This question was followed by a moment of silence, and then the old man responded:

''We don't know. What's the matter with Amorak?''

''Hasn't he been here?'' demanded Nak, still persisting in asking questions rather than in giving information.

''Yes,'' said the old man.

''Then where is he?''

''We don't know.''

''What became of him?''

''How should I say we don't know to *one* question if we could answer *that*?''

''Well, then,'' said Nak, ''what did he do?''

''He drank a good deal of brandy.''

This answer was followed by a chorus of low grunts, which Trim understood to be the Esquimau's manner of laughing.

''It would be well,'' remarked Nak, seriously, ''if Amorak didn't drink too much while this white boy is in Vilnak.

''Amorak will do well not to fall asleep just now.''

''What has Amorak done?'' demanded the old man.

''Never mind.''

Again there was a brief interval of silence, then a voice said:

''I think Amorak has done something wrong. He was boasting this afternoon about how rich he would be, and he promised to make us all rich with him.''

''Oh, did he?'' said Nak.

''Isn't it so?'' asked the old man.

''Is it a crime,'' returned Nak, ''to obey one's employer's orders?''

''No.''

"Then Amorak has done no wrong. I must find him."

"You'll have a hard hunt for him in this storm," remarked the old man. "I should think the snow would drive him back to the village before long, but if he doesn't come back he alone can tell where he is."

"He won't come back," responded Nak.

"Perhaps not. All we know is that he was the first among us to see your boat coming across the straits. While we were looking at it he disappeared.

"We didn't notice for some time that he had gone; just when he went away and where he went none of us know."

"Then," said Nak, "Amorak guessed what trouble there was for him in my boat, and he's taken the best way to avoid it."

"About that boat, now," said another voice. "How should there be a hole in a boat which you were rowing, Nak?"

"How can I answer such a question?"

"But you must know."

"I——"

"Look, Teeka," interrupted another; "you left the door open."

Hearing this, Trim hastily went back to his bunk and threw himself upon it just as the old man began to look in, muttering that he thought he had closed the door tightly.

It was evident that the Esquimau did not suspect that Trim had been listening.

The old man closed the door firmly, remarking that he would keep his hand upon the handle to prevent it from blowing open again.

"That ends my listening," thought Trim, "for what with their thick tongues and their queer language, it's all I can do to make out what they say when I can hear plainly.

"Well, I guess I heard enough. I know more surely than ever that Amorak has those papers, and that he took them away by Murdock's orders.

"It is pretty clear, too, that these Esquimaux are friendly people and that that rascal Nak doesn't dare let them wholly into the secret of the business on Taska Island. That being the case, it strikes me that I'm safe enough for this night, at least, unless Amorak should be driven back to the village by the storm, in which case he might look me up and fix things so that I shouldn't wake up in this world."

After thinking the matter over in every possible way Trim decided that it would not be safe to drop to sleep, and he therefore kept himself awake in spite of the fatigue he felt.

After a time the door was opened again and the old man came in. He moved carefully across the room and sat down on the edge of Trim's bunk.

Trim opened his eyes and looked at him.

"Ah!" said the old man in a kindly voice, "you no sleep?"

"Not now," answered Trim.

"You no fear," continued the old man. "I think you after Amorak."

Trim nodded.

"Amorak bad man."

Again Trim responded with a nod.

"Amorak done something—no know what—something bad—you want him—so?"

"So," answered Trim.

"Good! You no get him to-night."

Trim shook his head.

"Great storm," continued the old man, gravely. "Little wind—deep snow—Amorak hide somewhere—you weak—you sick—you no go out to-night—you get lost—you die in snow."

"Reckon that's right."

"To-morrow or next day when snow stop you take sled and dogs if you want hunt for Amorak—we give you guide—we give you food—anything you want."

"Thanks!" answered Trim, heartily. "But suppose Amorak should come back to-night?"

The old man shook his head.

"I think he no dare," he said, "and if he do I stay here—you no harm."

"All right," said Trim, "then I'll go to sleep."

And this the lad did, confident that the old Esquimau was honest and would remain to warn him of any possible danger.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHASE ON THE SNOW CRUST.

Next morning the snow had ceased. There was a dead level of about eighteen inches' depth over all the ground around Vilnak, but it was by no means of that light, flaky character that is usual in a midwinter snow storm.

Even when it fell the snow was moist and heavy.

Toward morning a change in the wind had brought about a very brief fall of rain, and after this another change of the wind drove the clouds away and crusted the snow so that a man could easily walk upon its surface.

The atmosphere was now bright and dry. Trim got up from his bunk feeling as well as ever he did in his life.

He not only had the advantage of youth in recovering from his exposure, but it was a fact that the treatment given him by the Esquimaux was the very best possible under the circumstances.

No city physician could have cared for him better. Most of the population of Vilnak came in to see him while he was breakfasting on dry herring and a coarse kind of cake that passes for the Esquimau bread.

The old man had been faithful to his word in keeping watch in the hut all through the night, and he was now ready to keep his promise of providing Trim with the means of pursuing Amorak.

Trim was anxious to set out as early as possible, and he found the Esquimaux willing to either guide or direct him in the course that would most likely lead him to the fugitive's hiding place.

The old man told him of a hut, miles away to the north, which was used by hunters when they went out for moose.

It was a place that nobody lived in the year around, and no white man had ever been there.

It seemed probable that Amorak would make for that spot rather than any other place in the vicinity, because he could find shelter there at least as long as the storm should last.

"He took no dogs with him," the old man explained, "and probably therefore means to hide there until he can learn that you have gone away. Now, if you go with a sled and dogs he will be able to see you coming while you are two miles away, and he will undoubtedly run for it, but with the swift dogs that we'll give you I should think that you'll be able to overtake him before nightfall."

"And if he isn't in that hut," asked Trim, "where should you think he would be?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders and answered:

"There's no telling. At the bottom of some ravine, perhaps, for if he tried to make his way through the storm of last night, it is more than likely he would fall over the edge of a cliff."

As the hunters' hut was about the only place, therefore, in the entire country around about Vilnak where Amorak might be found, Trim, of course, decided to make for it without delay.

He declined the offer of the Esquimaux to accompany him as guides or helpers.

"I'd rather do this thing alone," he said, "and if you'll simply tell me the way I'll be satisfied."

"The dogs know the way," said the old man. "We'll start you in the right direction and tell you about the landmarks, but once the dogs get turned toward that place they will go there without fail, for that's their habit."

Accordingly, as soon as he had finished his breakfast Trim took his position upon the sled, to which a team of eight dogs had been harnessed.

They were eager, lively animals, who stood pawing the snow restlessly as if anxious for the word to go.

Upon the sled was packed a small quantity of provisions and an extra blanket or two for Trim's use in case he would be compelled to go into camp somewhere for the night.

With good luck it would be possible for him to go as far as the hunters' cabin in a single day.

He had a long whip to guide the dogs. There were reins, of course, but the Esquimaux train their dogs to obey by the mere touch of the whip upon the leaders' sides.

These remarkable little animals have great intelligence. Every dog is trained to follow his leader, and the Esquimaux have a way of promoting good dogs from the rear of the team to the front, and it sometimes seems as if the dogs themselves were ambitious to behave so well that they could be placed at the head of the team.

Certain it is that when a dog acts badly and is harnessed to the sled he drops his tail and shows in other ways that he feels disgraced.

Trim had learned such things as this about the Esquimau dogs during his stay in and around Sitka, where he had more than once driven a team for the fun of it.

It was, therefore, with a feeling of confidence and keen pleasure that he cracked the whip and shouted:

"Aua! aua! Ja choiachoi!"

These are Esquimau words which in English translation might be put, "Get up there! Turn to the left!"

The dogs sprang forward, yelping with pleasure, and the Esquiamux grinned delightedly as they saw how readily the young fellow did his share in the work.

Trim had no difficulty whatever in directing the dogs, and for the next two hours he enjoyed himself as much as he ever had done in his life.

The way led over fairly level land, and in places where the crust of snow was not broken it was like an unending slide down hill.

The dogs ran so fast there was a continuous breeze upon Trim's face, and sometimes the tears came to his eyes from the fierceness of the wind. When this happened the water froze upon his cheeks, causing him to realize that the weather was intensely cold.

He was on the alert at all times, not only to get any possible sign of Amorak, but to see the lay of the land and to discover spots that the fugitive might use as a hiding place if he should be driven from his hut.

"I think this is the queerest detective case on record," he reflected. "I've never seen the man I'm after, I haven't had a photograph of him, and I haven't even taken the trouble to get his description, and yet I shall be perfectly confident that he's the man I'm after the minute I see him, for the only man besides myself in this vast wilderness of snow and ice will be Amorak."

After a time Trim recognized a steep cliff that the Esquimaux had told him about, at which point he knew that he must turn to the right.

He accordingly gave his dogs the direction but they were taking it already without the word, as the Esquimaux had foretold. They knew the way perfectly, and no guide was needed.

For the next half hour or so the progress was somewhat slower, the way lying up and over a portion of the cliff. Beyond the cliff the ground was more uneven, though for the most part it was down hill, and the distance was covered with tremendous speed.

Sometimes Trim had to hold a stick against the snow to prevent the sled from tripping up the dogs, who were unable to run as fast as it would have gone if left to itself.

For the most part, however, it was not necessary to use this queer brake.

It was just as Trim left the uneven ground behind and came upon a broad stretch of level land that he saw far ahead a little black speck upon the surface of the snow, from which a thin column of smoke arose.

His heart bounded at once. He knew that that must be the hut, and the curling smoke proved that some human being had occupied it during the night.

"That must be Amorak," he thought. "Now if only luck will prevent him from seeing me."

Luck was not in the pursuer's favor in this respect.

Trim urged his dogs to still greater speed, but within half a minute after his discovery of the hunters' hut he distinguished an object moving away from it.

It was too far to make out its form, but he rightly guessed it to be a man on the dead run.

"That's the business," he said to himself, excitedly.

"He's been on the watch for pursuit, he sees this dog team coming across the snow and he knows that somebody is after him.

"He's got the advantage of pretty nearly two miles' start and a perfect knowledge of the country.

"Gee whiz! but what fine dogs these are. This is better than yacht racing or horseback riding. I'd like to bet somebody that the dogs will win.

"Aua! aua!" he cried again. Whether the dogs went any faster at this command it was impossible to say. As it was, they seemed to be straining every nerve to get over the snow as if their lives depended on it.

Trim kept his eyes upon that moving spot in the distance. Suddenly he shouted: "Hurrah!"

It was evident that the dogs were gaining upon the man. Much to Trim's chagrin, the moment he shouted the dogs stopped running and the leaders looked around at him as if to ask what he wanted them to do next.

"Aua! aua! Go on, you brutes!" roared Trim. "What are you standing still for?"

The dogs started on, but not so fast as before, and it was not until after repeated commands that Trim got them up to their former height of speed. Then it flashed upon him why they stopped; it was because they had supposed he had commanded them to. His hurrah sounded almost like the Esquimau word "Ohaha," which means stop.

"I lost a few seconds by that foolishness," Trim thought, "but the dogs are good for it yet."

He could now distinguish the man quite clearly, and saw that he was making toward the west on a line directly across the line of Trim's approach.

"I wonder what he means by that?" said Trim to himself. 'Instead of running directly away from me he's going off to one side.

"Perhaps this place is near the sea and he hopes to get into a boat and so beat the dogs. I must try to head him off.

"Choia! choi! Ja choiachoi! Go to the left!" he cried.

And again the dogs obeyed promptly.

A little later Trim could see that the running Esquimau turned occasionally to look at him.

"He must be pretty scared," Trim thought "Let me see if I can't bring him to a halt in the old-fashioned way. I'll fire a shot across his bows, so to speak."

Accordingly Trim fired his revolver into the air.

His hope was that the Esquimau would be frightened by the sound of the weapon and so come to a standstill.

It took a few seconds for the report to reach Amorak's ears. Instead of stopping, the Esquimau suddenly changed his course and sped directly northward.

That fact caused Trim to gain more slowly upon him, but he nevertheless gained little by little, and at last there was not more than two hundred yards between the fugitive and pursuer.

Trim did not venture to call out, for fear the dogs would misunderstand his cry and stop again.

He thought of using his revolver, but he had no desire to kill Amorak, and he believed that it would be entirely possible to capture him within a few minutes.

They had now left the broad plain and had come upon another stretch of level that was different from the plain in that it was dotted with great bowlders and hummocks of ice.

On the plain, too, there had been scattered trees here there were none.

Trim did not know it then, but he learned afterward that he was crossing one of the greatest glaciers in the world. It is an immense river of ice that flows very, very slowly from the lakes and mountains inland to the sea, carrying with it rocks and everything else that comes in its path.

Generally the movement of such a glacier cannot be seen by the naked eye, though sometimes it is possible to discover its motion, and frequently it can be detected by the noise that the ice makes in the grinding against the bottom.

Even now Trim could hear a strange rumbling and once in a while a booming report that he could not understand.

In a moment he decided from what he had learned in reading that these noises must come from the movement of the glacier, but he did not then realize that he himself was on one.

It seemed as if the dogs knew better. Their speed decreased, and the leaders showed a desire to turn about and go elsewhere, and it was only by the frequent use of the whip that Trim kept them to their speed.

Another minute, a half minute, even, and they would be alongside of Amorak. He was running, and slipped in such a way that it was clear that his strength was nearly exhausted.

The forward dogs were almost on him, when he made a sharp turn to the right and disappeared behind a huge bowlder.

"To the right!" shouted Trim, touching the leaders with the whip.

The dogs wheeled around the bowlder as obediently as the best-trained horses would have done, and Trim's sled slewed in following.

They were going at such speed that it would have been impossible for the sled to make the turn without slewing more or less, and so smooth was the surface that the sled swung around in a half circle.

Just too late, Trim saw that there was an immense fissure, or crack, in the ice a few feet beyond the bowlder.

It was impossible to prevent the sled from going as far as the edge of that fissure, and the lad made a wild effort to leap.

It was too late even for that.

Amorak had conducted his flight with splendid shrewdness. He had led the team of dogs to just that point in the hope of accomplishing this very thing, knowing as he did that the sled would slew and carry his pursuer over the edge of the fissure.

It was all over in a second.

Trim, half rising, felt the sled suddenly give way, and down he went, his weight and that of the sled dragging the entire team of dogs after him.

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GLACIER.

As they went, boy and dogs making frantic efforts to clutch at the edge of the ice, he had a glimpse of an evil face looking down at him.

Amorak had run from the bowlder to the edge of the fissure, and was completing the catastrophe by pushing over the two dogs that led the team, and who would have been dragged over in any case.

Usually, to fall into the fissure of a glacier means certain death, for these cracks are exceedingly deep, and the chances are that he who falls in will be ground to pulp by the movement of the vast river of ice upon the stony bed below.

It was Amorak himself who saved Trim's life. By pushing the leading dogs over the edge he sent them down faster than the others in the team, so that they landed on the bottom first of all, and Trim, in his fall, landed on the dogs.

Their bodies made a cushion which saved him from anything more serious than a severe jolt. Fortunately the sled bounded on and came to a stop a few feet away, so that he was not injured by falling against it.

Having pushed the dogs over, Amorak hurried away from the fissure and failed to see what had happened.

Trim found himself between high walls of ice in a crooked, narrow alley.

Around him were the injured dogs. Four of them were so badly bruised that they were certain to die of their injuries, and without hesitation the lad put an end to their suffering with pistol shots.

The other four dogs failing as Trim did, upon the bodies of their companions, were not injured.

The sled was smashed beyond repair.

It may be said right here that Amorak, upon the surface of the glacier, heard the pistol shots, but supposed that they were merely the cracking of the glacier as it ground his enemy to death.

He went on to his hut, feeling prefectly satisfied that his troubles were at an end.

Trim lost no time in seeking a way out of his very dangerous situation.

Commanding the dogs to stay still, he went in both directions along the fissure until, to his great satisfaction, he came to a spot where the ice wall was not so steep as it was at the place where he fell. He saw but one way of escape for him, and that he proceeded to take without delay.

He first mended the broken harness and attached the remaining dogs to it in such a way that they were at the end of a long rope of hide, the other end of which he had around his waist.

Then with his pocket knife he began to chip out holes in the side of the ice wall, into which he placed his feet, one after another, and so worked his way gradually toward the surface.

It was a long and difficult task, and more than once he slipped and went tumbling again to the bottom.

After three or four such slips he used more caution, for it would not do to fall from a great height.

So at length he worked his way to the top. Then he dug a little furrow in the ice near the edge, in which he braced his feet and began to pull upon his rope.

It was a severe tug, and the dogs did not enjoy the process any more than Trim did, but it resulted in his bringing every one of the four dogs unharmed from the bottom of the fissure.

This done, he arranged the harness again so that the dogs could drag him.

He had no sled, but the surface was so smooth that he could slide sufficiently well upon his feet; so he gave the command to the dogs to start, and off they went, dragging him after them.

In this way he made much faster progress than he could have made by running.

He shrewdly guessed that Amorak would return to the hut, where, in all probability, he had concealed the stolen papers.

It proved to be but a few minutes' run to arrive there, and Amorak was not aware of his enemy's approach until Trim threw himself against the door of the hut and burst it open.

Inside he found the startled Esquimau just in the act of hastily tucking a large envelope inside his jacket. The fellow was too startled to make much of a resistance, and there is no need, therefore, of describing the very brief struggle that followed.

The rest of the story is soon told.

Trim bound his prisoner, and then fashioned a rude sled out of boards found in the hut, and on this both were dragged back to Vilnak by the four dogs.

There Trim paid the Esquimaux handsomely for the dogs that had been lost in the adventure and for the other services the inhabitants had rendered him.

A boatman took him directly from Vilnak to Sitka with his prisoner, where, in short order the mystery of the papers was solved.

It seemed that Murdock was dissatisfied with the conduct of his partners and had a scheme by which he could force them to make better terms with him in the sale of the mine by concealing the papers so that no sale could be made until his own terms had been agreed to. Then he had intended to produce the papers and accuse Amorak of having stolen them.

He had also arranged to let Amorak escape, so that the Esquimau should suffer no trouble for the risks he ran.

The robbery, of course, was committed by Murdock himself, and the blowing of the lock to pieces was accomplished afterward, as Trim had discovered by the investigation of the hole drilled in the safe door.

It was also proved, of course, that when Murdock learned so clever a fellow as Trim was to be engaged upon the case, he persuaded Cadloo to make an attempt to kill the lad.

This rascally effort having failed, Murdock's next plan was to prevent Trim from reaching the island of Taska.

To effect this he managed to bribe the Esquimau engaged as Trim's skipper to set the lad ashore on a small island occupied by a band of smugglers and other outlaws.

Luckily there were but two of the band at the island when Trim arrived there, and though they would have overpowered him for the sake of the money he carried if he had gone ashore, the lad escaped their clutches, as we have seen.

Later Trim took a trip to this island to investigate farther, but it proved that the smugglers had taken fright at his brief call there and had abandoned the place.

It appears, too, that they must have left that part of the country, for they were not heard of again.

When all these matters had been made clear, and Bellows, the New York capitalist, was satisfied with the mine and the terms for its purchase, he said to Trim:

"I told you I'd make it worth your while if you recovered those papers. My point was that if you proved that your theory was correct and that you had the ability to work it out, you would be just the fellow I want to employ in another case.

"Now, if you want to undertake it I will tell you about it."

Trim, very much pleased with his success in the two cases he had already undertaken, agreed, and the result was an investigation which is narrated in: "Trim and the Swedish Swindler; Or, De Bilk-You's Career in Alaskan Society," in No. 3 of the NEW NICK CARTER LIBRARY.

[THE END.]

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